

# Wildlife Program

Week of January 2, 2012

## **LANDS DIVISION**

### ***GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE.***

Region 6 Access staff Brian Mitchell and Jeff Putscher worked side by side with the Lacey Shop to repair 4 ramps in less than one week, and way under budget. Kudos to all involved!



*Isabella Lake Before*



*After*

Removed the ramp, and salvaged the planks that were still in good shape to use on other ramp repairs.

People have been launching their boats successfully off the shore for years because of the broken ramp, so we will leave this lake with a shoreline launch.



*Lost Lake Before*



*After*

Removed 5 broken planks, and added 10x20 feet of Armor Flex on the side that washed out.



*Spencer Lake Before*



*After*

Removed all planks above the water line, flattened out the mound the ramp had been built on, and replaced 4 broken planks.



*Phillips Lake Before*



*After*

Removed 22 broken planks and replaced with used and new planks. All hauling of broken planks to the concrete recycler was done by Brian and Jeff, as was the hauling in of crushed rock and the gathering of supplies. Prior to construction, Brian and Jeff prepped the ramps by digging out rock between the planks and cutting off and removing the bolt heads. They also hauled new planks from the Tumwater Shop to the sites, using the dump trailer. The site prep and working in concert with the Lacey Shop crew were the keys to coming in under budget. They thoroughly enjoyed this work, and when it came time to do storm clean-up and repairs, they asked if they could be transferred to ramp repair and installation instead!



*Offut Lake Before*



*After*



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## **OUTREACH**

### ***GOAL 2: PROVIDE SUSTAINABLE FISHING, HUNTING AND OTHER WILDLIFE-RELATED RECREATIONAL EXPERIENCES.***

#### **Wildlife Management**

**Hunting Prospects:** Completed an application for a grant from the National Shooting Sports Foundation called “Recruiting and Retaining Hunters in Washington through Improved Hunting Prospects Information.” This evolved from discussions on ways to provide central direction to field staff on techniques to get more consistent mapping products to accompany the annual hunting prospects. These discussions coincided with a grant opportunity from NSSF. Special thanks to Jeff Foisy and Shelly Snyder for preparing the application.

#### **Other**

**WildWatchcams:** Not only did many WDFW employees deal with the recent stormy wind, snow and rain, but so did many of the WildWatchcam systems and the creatures they focus on. The Lake Washington eagle nest is solidly lodged near the top of very tall Douglas-fir and the following photos portray some of the before-and-after storm results from an eagle’s perspective.



**Environmental Education, Citizen Science:** Outreach Team staff have been contacted by Governor Gregoire’s Policy Office to help provide advice and program ideas for the Governor’s **Get Out West** initiative. As chair of the Western Governors’ Association, Governor Gregoire launched **Get Out West** to promote outdoor recreation and tourism, especially among youth and families, as a way to inspire future stewardship of the great places in the West - <http://www.westgov.org/initiatives/get-out-west>

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## **REGION 1**

None.

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## **REGION 2**

### **Region 2 – Okanogan, Douglas, Chelan, Grant and Adams Counties**

**Regional Wildlife Program Manager: Matt Monda**

#### **DISTRICT BIOLOGISTS**

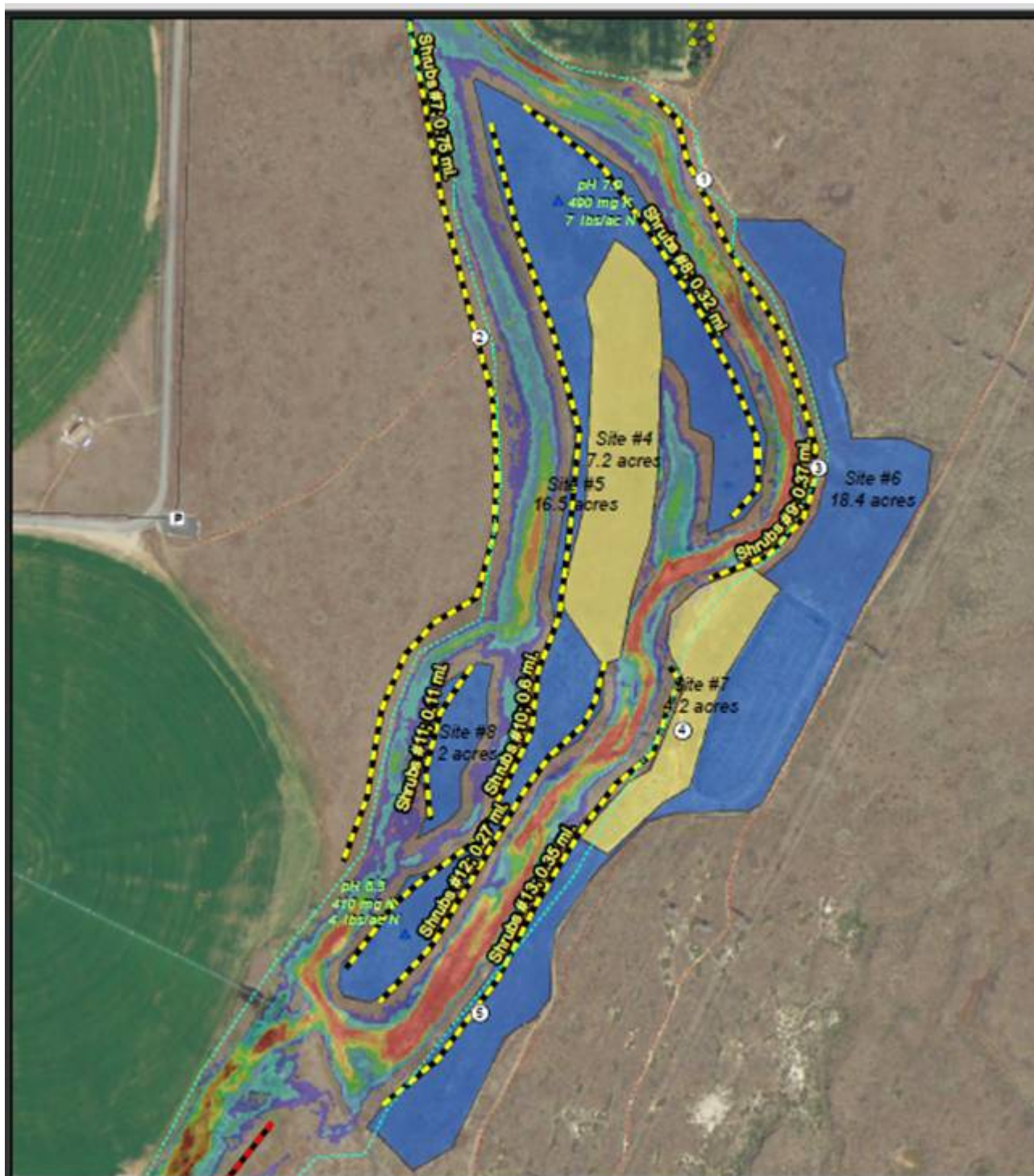
##### **District 5: Grant / Adams District - Rich Finger / Brock Hoenes**

#### ***GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE.***

**Washington ground squirrels:** Biologist Finger met with G. Fitzgerald and R. Nelson of Columbia Basin Wildlife Area to discuss sagebrush removal methods along Lind Coulee. Historic grazing has result in dense shrub cover which appears to be limiting Washington ground squirrel distribution and productivity in this area. A relatively dense colony of ground squirrels occurs in nearby needle-and-thread grassland. It is anticipated that removing the sagebrush will allow greater productivity of native perennial bunchgrasses (primarily needle-and-thread and bluebunch wheatgrass) and native forbs (primarily balsamroot). Methods discussed included mowing when the ground was frozen to minimize ground disturbance, and herbicide application, product and timing to reduce non-target impacts to native forbs (particularly balsamroot). Both methods are planned to be tested this year on a small, localized scale. More investigation into herbicide methods is needed.

#### ***GOAL 2: PROVIDE SUSTAINABLE FISHING, HUNTING AND OTHER WILDLIFE-RELATED RECREATIONAL EXPERIENCES.***

**Middle Crab Creek Habitat Enhancement:** Biologist Finger and Wildlife Area Manager Fitzgerald discussed and reviewed all potential habitat work to be conducted in the Gloyd Unit of the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area. Identified were 244 acres of disturbed sites (historic food plots or cattle feeding sites) which are ideal for conversion to dense nesting cover (perennial bunchgrasses, greasewood), 28.5 acres for food plots (primarily winter wheat) along the crab creek channel, 13.7 acres to test perennial pepper weed control methods, 8.9 linear miles of stream bank stabilization using willow cuttings, 2 linear miles of stream bank to establish winter food/cover for upland game birds and neo-tropical migrants, 4.1 linear miles needing stabilization and winter food/cover, and a little over 400 Russian olive trees that need to be removed. An example of planned work below:



# Gloyd Seeps Restoration/Enhancement 1:5,000 400 cfs flood model Brent Miller Dike

0 75 150 300 450 Meters



Food plot	Winter cover
Enhancement	Stabilization
Restoration	Stabilization + winter cover
Trial	Soil pH
660 cfs flood line	RussianOlive
	Photopoint



**Mule Deer:** Biologist Hoenes continued work on a document that will summarize the Columbia Plateau Mule Deer survey effort over the past 3 years. Biologists incorporated a sight-ability model with the intent of generating unbiased estimates of population size, age ratios (fawn:doe), and sex ratios (buck:doe) for a mule deer herd that migrates through three separate management districts and counties. The intent of this effort is to develop a monitoring program that will allow Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) to more accurately and efficiently monitor the demographic trends (e.g. population size, sex ratios) for this herd which in turn will allow for the development of informed management decisions.

***GOAL 4: MAINTAIN A HIGHLY SKILLED AND MOTIVATED WORKFORCE.***

**District 6: Okanogan District - Scott Fitkin / Jeff Heinlen**

**Weather Conditions:** Heavy snow fell in the Methow Valley this week yielding a snowpack of almost 3 feet on the flat in Winthrop before it began to settle. Freezing rain followed on the weekend and produced a moderate crust. Snow depth on deer winter range is about average for this time of year in the Methow, with forage still reasonably accessible, particularly on south facing slopes. Snow depths in the Okanogan Valley are noticeably shallower.

**Weekender Opportunities:** Now is a good time to get out and observe animal tracks in the snow, particularly with district-wide snow cover. Groomed snowmobile routes and ski trails, access many hundreds of miles of wildlife rich terrain. Guided “Nature of Winter” snowshoe tours focused on winter ecology and snow-tracking are offered every weekend through March 3 in the Methow Valley. See the link for more information <http://www.mvsta.com/snowshoe.html>.



*Winter in Winthrop.*



*Lynx tracks – Hart's Pass Rd.*

***GOAL 2: PROVIDE SUSTAINABLE FISHING, HUNTING AND OTHER WILDLIFE-RELATED RECREATIONAL EXPERIENCES.***

**Elk Management:** Wildlife Biologists Scott Fitkin and Jeff Heinlen assisted other Region 1 and Region 2 staff in hosting a public meeting in Okanogan on the draft Selkirk Elk Herd Plan. For the Okanogan District, the most important issue in the plan is the proposal to include Game Management Unit (GMU) 204, and manage the unit more conservatively for a larger sustainable harvest and better viewing opportunities. Only about 15 people turned out for the meeting and

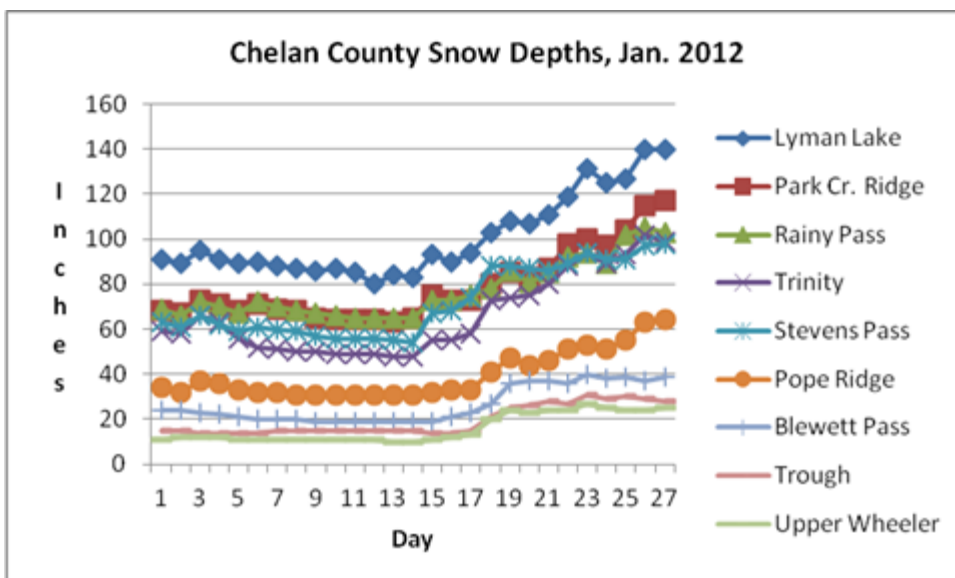
all who spoke expressed support for the proposal to increase elk numbers in GMU 204. Furthermore, several urged the agency to pursue a similar strategy in other Okanogan County GMUs. No one spoke out against the plan or voiced concerns about agricultural conflicts; however, it did not appear anyone from an agricultural organization attended. More public discussion of this issue is likely during upcoming meetings on the next 3-yr hunting package.



*Cow*

#### **District 7: Chelan / Douglas District – David Volsen / Jon Gallie**

**Weather Conditions:** Recent storms brought considerable amounts of snow to Chelan and Douglas Counties. While warm temperatures and sunny days have started to melt snows in Douglas County, snow depths are increasing in the heart of the Cascade Range. Over the past 10 days, snow depths have increased 24 to 48 percent (12 – 46 inches) across Chelan County. Most the snow accumulation is occurring in the western part of the county; however, enough snow has fallen at lower elevations for us to see a downward movement of deer and bighorn sheep on their winter ranges.



## ***GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE***

**Pygmy Rabbit Survey:** Biologists Volsen and Gallie focused most of their time this week on surveying for pygmy rabbits on the Sagebrush Flat Wildlife Area. Using remote cameras, biologist Becker has documented pygmy rabbit kits living on the WMA after leaving soft release pens. Our objective was to document the continued presence of pygmy rabbits in those areas. Over the week, more than 35 miles of transect were surveyed by WDFW staff. Four den locations were discovered and evidence of rabbits was found in five of the high priority areas. Fecal pellets were collected at each site to determine the species of the rabbits. Without visual observations of the rabbits a final determination of species cannot be made at this time. Plans are to deploy remote cameras at these sites to attempt to document species.

## **WILDLIFE AREAS**

### **Wells Wildlife Area Complex –Dan Peterson / Ann Winters / Fidel Rios**

## ***GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE.***

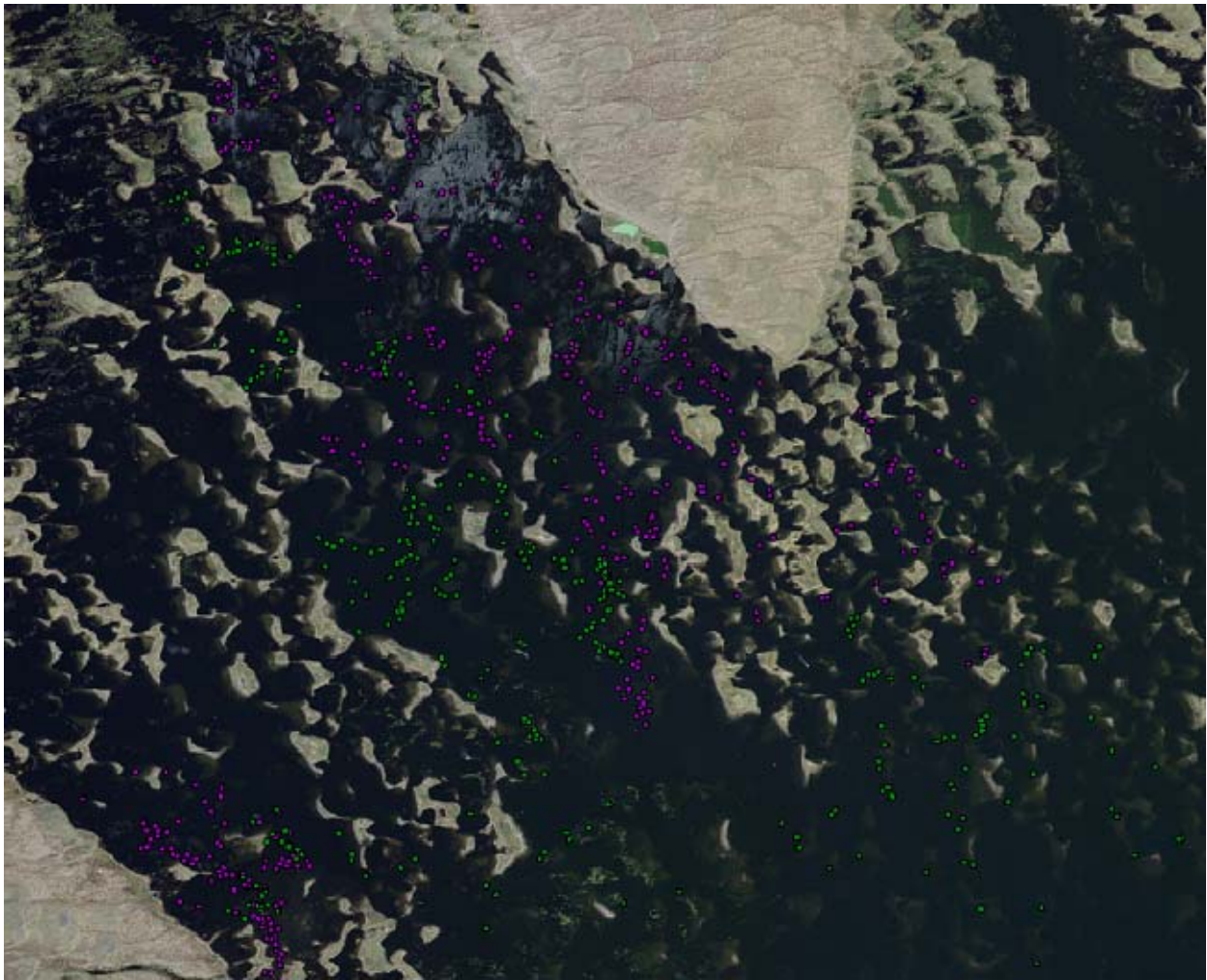
**Tour of Rufus Woods Lake:** Tuesday, Biologists Peterson and Winters spent the day with US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Biologist Bob Fischer on a boat tour of Rufus Woods Lake. Of primary interest were the many riparian draws on both sides of the river that contain significant stands of water birch trees. Most easily accessible by boat, many of these sites, particularly those in Bailey Basin (Okanogan County) and the extreme northeast corner of Douglas County may well be used by sharp-tailed grouse for winter forage but due to their inaccessibility are not easily checked. Bob, Dan and Ann discussed timing a return trip following a significant snowfall to perform a more thorough inspection of the Bailey Basin site. During the day they observed numerous bald eagles, great blue herons and many ducks including goldeneye, bufflehead and common merganser.

### **Columbia Basin Wildlife Area Complex – Greg Fitzgerald / Brian Cole / Roger Nelson**

## ***GOAL 3: USE SOUND BUSINESS PRACTICES, DELIVER HIGH-QUALITY CUSTOMER SERVICE.***

**Weed Control:** Fitzgerald and Vegetation Management Specialist Roger Nelson overlaid GPS waypoints of *Phragmites* control points onto aerial photos of the North Potholes Reservoir to review and compare to past efforts. For the past four summers Roger Nelson has spent several days/year spot spraying small *Phragmites* patches through the dune islands and Crab Creek Arm portions of the reservoir. The 16-foot summer drawdown of Potholes Reservoir exposes more and more shoreline as the summer progresses. This allows access to more of the patches but also allows a much wider band for *Phragmites* to establish. Marking waypoints gives Roger the ability to avoid multiple herbicide applications. The 400+ waypoints recorded in 2011 illustrate the enormity of the job, without the treatments the willow dominated wetlands of the North Potholes may become just another huge stand of *Phragmites*.





### **Sinlahekin Wildlife Area Complex - Dale Swedberg / Justin Haug**

**Weather Conditions:** For the week daytime temperatures ranged from a low of 29 to a high of 45, nighttime temperatures ranged from a low of 10 to a high of 22. Wind averages ranged from .4 to 3 mph with gusts ranging from 8 to 22 mph. Some additional snow fell, but warmer temperatures at the end of the week settled the snow so there was no added snow depth.

**Weekender Opportunities:** No change in bird watching opportunities. Red-tailed hawks, pileated woodpeckers, northern shrike, northern harriers, pine grosbeak, redpolls, trumpeter swans, Bohemian waxwings. Add Clark's nutcrackers and black-capped chickadees. White-tailed and mule deer are visible early in the morning or early evening.

### ***GOAL 3: USE SOUND BUSINESS PRACTICES, DELIVER HIGH-QUALITY CUSTOMER SERVICE.***

**Public Meeting – Sinlahekin Citizen's Advisory Group Meeting:** Manager Swedberg and Assistant Manager Haug attended the Sinlahekin Citizens Advisory Group Meeting in Tonasket. Assistant Manager Haug did an excellent job of preparing and presenting a PowerPoint program regarding past year accomplishments and plans for the upcoming year. Comments, which were for the most part positive, were solicited and documented, with at least 2 individuals stating that they thought we were doing a good job and the Sinlahekin looks good – referring to the fuels

reduction and prescribed burning. There were 18 individuals present not counting Manager and Assistant Manager.

**Driscoll Island Cold Water Refugia Project and Shrub Planting Project:** Manager Swedberg, Assistant Manager Haug and Hydraulics Engineer McCoy participated on a conference call with Jason Lundgren, ED of the Cascade Columbia Fisheries Enhancement Group to discuss expectation and plans for data collection in preparation for exploring the possibility of engineering coldwater refugia channels on Driscoll Island for endangered upper Columbia steelhead and salmon. Hydraulics Engineer McCoy was, has been, and is a great help in these conversations – a BIG thank you to her. After the foregoing discussion Manager Swedberg and Assistant Manager Haug continued the conference call to discuss planning for the completion of a Tributary Fund Grant to install irrigation and plant shrubs on Driscoll Island.

### **Chelan Wildlife Area Complex - Ron Fox**

#### ***GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE.***

**Chelan Public Utility District Coordination:** Chelan Manager, Ron Fox, attended the Rocky Reach Wildlife Forum Meeting hosted by the Chelan Public Utility District (CPUD). The intent of the meeting was to provide an update of progress meeting objectives identified in the Wildlife Management Plan (WMP) that is part of the settlement agreement for operation of Rocky Reach Hydro Project. Included in the WMP is \$10,000/year for weed control projects that has so far gone unspent because of conflicts between the individual contracts with participants in the WAM and the accounting and billing procedures used by CPUD. CPUD staff and Forum members are trying to work out a method to utilize this money for weed control projects in 2012.

### **PRIVATE LANDS - John Cotton / Eric Braaten / JoAnn Wisniewski**

#### ***GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE.***

**State Areas for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE):** Private Lands Biologist Cotton gave a presentation with Mel Asher (Benson Farms Inc) at the Foster Creek Conservation District Annual Meeting on forb seeding for SAFE. Topics covered included: Why forbs are important for sage-grouse and other wildlife, The type of forbs included in the plans, example seed mixes, how forb seed mixes were formulated, site preparation for forb seeding, and forb seeding techniques. Private Lands Biologist Braaten spent time talking with Douglas County landowners about SAFE issues with their contracts and fields.

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## **REGION 3**

None.

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## **REGION 4**

### ***GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE***

#### **Wildlife Management**

**Swan Morbidity and Mortality Study:** Washington Dept. of Fish and Wildlife, Canadian Wildlife Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Trumpeter Swan Society, and Washington Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit at the University of Washington are partnering to look into the causes of mortality in trumpeter and tundra swans wintering in northwestern Washington. Technicians Lapsansky and Otto, along with volunteer Mike Smith retrieved more than 20 swan carcasses and documented several feather piles following the snow melt off event over the past week. Lapsansky collected tissue samples from each of these swans.

**Citizen Science Amphibian Monitoring Training:** Biologist Anderson attended the Northwest Trek citizen science training session with School and Community Engagement Supervisor Katie Remine, Education Programs Coordinator Jenny Mears, and Curator of Herpetology, Dr. Jenny Pramuk. Anderson and Woodland Park staff sat in on the training to gain a familiarity of how it has been run in the past and what common questions citizens have. Anderson provided Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary materials for the class students. Dr. Pramuk and Biologist Anderson assisted Northwest Trek Conservation and Education Program Coordinator Jessica Moore with some of the class questions regarding amphibian biology and life history specifics of certain species. It was a good class and very beneficial for collaborative planning needs of the upcoming Woodland Park Zoo class, which will have three times the number of participants.

**University of Washington Red-legged frog study:** Biologist Anderson worked with Biologist and Data Steward Salzer to summarize WDFW data on bullfrog and red-legged frog occurrences in King County. Anderson provided this to a Master's student that is working with WDFW in the citizen science amphibian monitoring effort to obtain data on red-legged frogs in urbanizing landscapes. Anderson discussed the WDFW data with the student and provided suggestions for use and other sources of similar data.

**Winter Waterfowl Survey:** Biologist Anderson finalized data entry and QA/QC of urban winter waterfowl survey for 2012 in District 12, King County. Areas included were Lake Washington, Lake Sammamish, Green Lake, among other urban bodies of water. Noted less common species or species of management concern were Eurasian Wigeons and Redheads in low numbers (handful or so); Trumpeter and Tundra Swans; Cackling Geese, one of which observed with a neck band and determined to have been banded in July 2011 near Chevak, AK by Yukon Delta USFWS staff, now wintering with 1,000 or so of Cackling Geese at Marymoor Park; as well as scatterings of Ruddy Duck on appropriate bodies of water. The largest concentration of urban waterfowl consisted of over 6,000 individuals counted in Lake Washington.

#### **Wildlife Areas**

**Waterwheel Creek Restoration – Cherry Valley:** Restoration Coordinator Windrope and Real Estate Expert Elyse Kane have developed a draft Land Use Agreement and asked for review from the Attorney General's office. The Land Use Agreement between Wild Fish Conservancy, Drainage District #7 and WDFW lays out the relationship and responsibilities for restoring Waterwheel Creek. Next week, Windrope will gather input from all partners on refinements to the Agreement with the goal of having it signed by the first week of February. The Adaptive



Management Plan is complete and has been incorporated into the Land Use Agreement. Based on conversations with Wild Fish Conservancy, WDFW Habitat Program and Engineering, the project seems headed for construction this summer. We will have certainty once the Land Use Agreement is signed by all parties.

***GOAL 2: PROVIDE SUSTAINABLE FISHING, HUNTING AND OTHER WILDLIFE-RELATED RECREATIONAL EXPERIENCES.***

**Wildlife Management**

**Mid-winter Swan Survey:** Biologist DeBruyn coordinated the annual mid-winter swan survey for Districts 13 and 14. In District 14, Biologists Danilson, DeBruyn, Bohannon, Roozen and Technician Deyo, along with several volunteers conducted the in Skagit and Whatcom Counties. Preliminary review of data from Skagit and Whatcom Counties suggests that the overall population was down from previous years.

**Brant Hunter Bag Check:** Biologists Danilson and DeBruyn conducted bag checks of brant hunters during the final weekend of waterfowl season. Harvest was fairly high ( $\geq 1.5$  brant/hunter) with a high proportion from the western high arctic population and the majority of all brant harvested being juveniles.



*Technician Chad Deyo showing off brant hunting success on his day off from the private lands quality hunt program.*



*Biologist Chris Danilson mixing it up with brant hunters and enforcement staff during the opening weekend of the Skagit County Brant season.*

***GOAL 3: USE SOUND BUSINESS PRACTICES, DELIVER HIGH-QUALITY CUSTOMER SERVICE.***

**Wildlife Management**

**Black Bear Hibernation Inquiry:** King 5 meteorologist Jeff Renner contacted Biologist Kertson regarding information on black bear hibernation in western Washington. Mr. Renner had received a number of inquiries from viewers wondering if local black bears hibernate and how weather impacts hibernation timing and characteristics. Biologist Kertson spoke with Mr. Renner at length, providing in depth information on black bear hibernation and general ecology in western Washington. Mr. Renner did an outstanding job of summarizing and presenting the information to his viewers throughout King 5's evening broadcasts.

***GOAL 4: MAINTAIN A HIGHLY SKILLED AND MOTIVATED WORKFORCE.***

**Wildlife Management**

**Cougar Research Publication:** Biologist Kertson submitted his publication entitled, "Demographic influences on cougar residential use and interactions with people in western Washington" to the Journal of Mammalogy. His publication characterizes cougar wildland-urban ecology and factors that contribute to interactions with people by quantifying residential use and interaction levels for different sex, age, and social classes of cougar. The manuscript also provides a number of management recommendations based his findings.

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## **REGION 5**

### ***GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE***

#### **Wildlife Management**

**St. Helens Elk:** Biologist Bergh and Technician Pyzik continued their effort to locate collared elk in the Mt St Helens elk herd. Twenty-six collars were located; six were on or near the mudflow area. One of the collars that had a mortality signal last week was collected. Two more remain to be collected.



**Western Pond Turtles:** Biologists Anderson and Holman met with Oregon Zoo Conservation Director Shepardson along with animal keepers and a veterinarian from the Oregon Zoo. The meeting offered a chance to discuss husbandry techniques at the zoo, the shell-rot problem, and the Head Start program in general. The Oregon Zoo in Portland and the Woodland Park Zoo in Seattle have been critical partners in the effort to recover the State Endangered western pond



turtle. Thanks to the Zoos for their continued partnership and expertise in animal care and health.

## **Wildlife Areas**

**Dogs Attack Deer on Klickitat Wildlife Area:** A neighbor of the Sondino Unit (near Lyle) reported that two dogs attacked a deer that was floundering in snow. The neighbor scared the dogs off by firing a couple shots. However, he did not think it prudent to take it upon himself to dispatch the deer. Instead, he reported the incident to the Klickitat County Sheriff's Office and an officer arrived within an hour. The deer was in bad shape and was dispatched. This incident reportedly took place on WDFW land. This unit of the Wildlife Area was purchased expressly for conservation of critical habitat for a threatened species, the western pond turtle. Dogs are not permitted on this property except by written permission, due to potential conflicts with wildlife and disruption of work occurring there. Additionally, it is never acceptable for unattended dogs to harass and injure wildlife on a Wildlife Area.

**Cowlitz Wildlife Area 2011 Annual Weed Report:** Assistant Manager Vanderlip completed the 2011-weed report for submission in the Annual Report to Tacoma Power to meet FERC requirements. The format of the annual report was recently revised to facilitate the use in multiple documents. A copy was also submitted to the Lands Division to meet agency reporting requirements.

## ***GOAL 2: PROVIDE SUSTAINABLE FISHING, HUNTING AND OTHER WILDLIFE-RELATED RECREATIONAL EXPERIENCES.***

## **Wildlife Management**

**Region 5 Deer Post-season Surveys:** Biologist Holman summarized the post season deer surveys in game management unit 382 (East Klickitat). These surveys are conducted each year, after hunting season and before the start of antler shedding, by a combination of WDFW Staff and volunteers. Data generated from this effort is used to evaluate the structure of hunting seasons and assure that management objectives are met. The mild weather conditions in December produced poor deer survey results with just 220 deer classified. The fawn to doe ratio was 65 to 100 and the buck to doe ratio was 18 to 100. Graphic illustration along with summaries from the other Klickitat GMUs will be presented in future reports.

**SW Washington Goose season:** The regular goose season for management area 2A ended this past Sunday January 29, 2012. The check stations checked in 43 geese from hunters visiting the stations on 32 occasions. Three duskies were harvested this weekend out of zones 4 and 3. In total, the check stations were visited by hunters 790 times and checked in 1,578 geese. That is down from regular season harvest numbers from last year with hunters visiting the check stations 926 times and checking in 1,783 geese. The harvest rate did increase from 1.9 geese per hunter last year to a flat 2.0 geese per hunter this year. That is a 5% increase over the previous year. 14 duskies were harvested out of management area 2A this season, which is down from 16 last year. All of the zones in management area 2A with the exception of zone 1 remained open for the entire regular season.

## **Wildlife Areas**

**Watchable Wildlife at Shillapoo Wildlife Area:** While working this week in the North Unit, Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Hauswald had a rare winter sighting of a small flock of Western Bluebirds. Migrating ducks have arrived in large numbers this past week as well. Northern pintail, wigeon, mallards, green-winged teal, and even a couple of cinnamon teal have also been spotted this past week. Canada geese, Sandhill cranes, and Bald eagles can also be seen readily this time of year on the Vancouver Lowlands.

## **Private Lands/Access**

**Hunting Access:** Biologist Stephens met with Olympic Resource Management to discuss hunting access on their land north and south of the Swift Reservoir. Biologist Stephens also met with Columbia Land Trust to discuss hunting access opportunities on their properties in Wahkiakum and Pacific counties. Technician White contacted landowners enrolled in the Hunt by Written Permission program in order to collect hunting permission slips to summarize hunting use on these lands.

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## **Winter Conditions**

### **D-10 & MSHWA Winter Conditions:**

**Past Weather:** November temperatures were below normal and precipitation was slightly above average. Snow accumulated in mid and low elevations early in the month but was later melted off by a major warm rainstorm. Most of the month of December was unusually dry with below normal temperatures except the last week, which was warm and wet. The first half of January was mild with relatively warm and dry conditions, but was followed by a mid-month storm with significant low elevation snow and valley accumulations. The latter part of the month has been relatively normal with occasional rain and snow elevations generally above 2500 feet.

**Short-Term Forecast:** Cool and wet conditions are expected over the next week with snow levels ranging from 2500 to 4000 feet. Valley temperatures will range from the low 30's to mid 40's. The 6-10 and 8-14 day outlooks suggest above normal temperatures and below average precipitation.

**Long-Term Forecast:** *No Change.* The longer term outlook maps have been updated and still suggest below normal temperatures and above normal precipitation throughout the winter, but Southwest Washington is now on the edge of these forecast zones.

**Habitat:** Snow below 2500 feet is only minor at this time with little effect on forage availability.

**Snow Depths:** Little snow left in the lowest elevations. Snowpack now near average in the Southwest Cascades (95%). See spreadsheet below for detailed information ([30Jan2012-MSH\\_Sno-Depth.pdf](#)).

**Animal Concentrations:** No unusual concentrations noted to date. 176 elk were present in the mudflow monitoring area during a survey January 3, 2012. This and the previous December 5, 2011 total of 116 elk are below levels that would raise concerns.

**Animal Condition:** No reports of animals in poor condition that can be attributed to winter conditions. Animals observed to date appear to be in reasonably good condition. Some animals on the Wildlife Area are showing rough pelage, but none have been seen that appear to be in severe decline.

**Mortality:** None to report.

**Public Contacts:** None to report related to winter conditions.

The public is reminded that the Mudflow Unit of the Mt. St. Helens Wildlife Area lying East of a line defined by Hoffstadt Creek, The North Fork Toutle and Deer Creek is closed to public access through April 30 to minimize disturbance and associated energy demands on elk wintering there.

### **District 9: Winter Conditions**

**Past Weather:** A severe snow/ice storm hit this past week in the South Cascades. Snow levels came down below 500 ft with heavy snow throughout the Columbia River Gorge. Snowpack has returned to more normal levels for this time of year.

**Weather This week:** The weather moderated this week after last week's snow storm. Warmer weather has continued this week and no new snow is reported since early in the week.

**Winter Severity:** There is still little concern for the overall severity of the winter conditions on big game populations in Skamania County and the western portion of Klickitat County. These conditions could change with additional snow throughout the winter. Until recently the winter severity has been minimal on big game.

**Habitat:** At the Klickitat Wildlife Area 95 % of forage habitat is covered in approximately 10 inches of snow. Some south facing slopes are starting to melt with some grass available. In Skamania County snow conditions are also poor for big game with crusty conditions.

**Animal Concentrations:** One group of 35 elk was reported in the Wind River drainage being fed apples by a concerned landowner.

**Animal Condition:** Deer and elk appear to still be in good condition as the severe winter conditions have been a recent event.

**Mortality:** None documented this week.

**Public Contacts:** No weather related concerns raised by the public this week.

## **REGION 6**

### ***GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE***

#### **Wildlife Management**

**Mid-Winter Waterfowl:** Biologists from each district submitted mid-winter waterfowl counts for Region 6. Waterfowl numbers were lower than some years in the past, although mild



weather prior to the survey may have played a role. No major changes in area designation, other than this year District 16 staff made many edits to the Survey/Unit Areas to better represent the coverage and Priority designation of surveyed areas (maps and Lat/Long locations will be edited and submitted in February).

**District 16 Swans:** Biologist Ament investigated a lone swan was located in a little cove on the river. The swan showed no obvious injuries and seemed to be swimming fine up-river when last seen, however, it is unknown if the swan can fly. Bio Ament coordinated with volunteer Martha Jordan regarding the swan. Volunteers were requested to monitor the swan when possible. Later, volunteer Jordan contacted Bio Ament early last week to coordinate a swan count using funding from the swan project grant. Bio Ament, in coordination with Olympic National Park biologist Sue Thomas surveyed areas from Port Angeles to Dungeness and known swan areas in eastern Jefferson County. A total of 172 swans (8 separate groups) were observed during the flight. A total of 97 swans were observed in the Dungeness area and 75 swans were counted in eastern Jefferson.

**Deer – Bremerton Watershed:** Bio Skriletz met with Bremerton Watershed staff to begin planning a limited deer hunt next season to balance the deer numbers in the watershed. Testing indicated an isolated increase in the fecal coliform count and trail cameras were set up to determine the source. We intend to use Master Hunters next season on an as-needed basis. This will be the first opportunity for public hunting in this 8,000 acres of well managed, top quality deer habitat.

## ***GOAL 2: PROVIDE SUSTAINABLE FISHING, HUNTING AND OTHER WILDLIFE-RELATED RECREATIONAL EXPERIENCES.***

**Private Timberland Access:** Bio Harris, RPM Cope, and R5 Private Lands Bio Stephens met with Hancock Forest Management (HFM) Operations Forester for lands in GMU's 506, 658, 673, & 684 about hunting access. HFM purchased most of WEYCO lands in these GMU's in 2011. Currently all lands are open to non-motorized access. During MF deer and elk season motorized access was allowed in 2011. HFM has now installed gates around the perimeters of these lands. They are now in the process of installing interior gates. The intention of the meeting was to discuss the placement of these gates and how they could be used to distribute hunters during the hunting seasons. We were also going to discuss how WDFW provided gates could aid in this process. However, at the meeting we were informed that HFM corporate management has indicated that they may want to implement some form of a permit access program to these lands. At this time it is unknown what type of program they are considering. WDFW staff plan to continue to work with HFM on this emerging issue.

## ***GOAL 3: USE SOUND BUSINESS PRACTICES, DELIVER HIGH-QUALITY CUSTOMER SERVICE.***

### **Wildlife Management**

**Western Washington Sportsmen's Show (Puyallup):** Biologists Skriletz, Murphie, Michaelis, Harris, and RPM Cope worked at the Sportsman's Show, covering almost all open time slots along with Fish Management staff. The vast majority of the issues were about wolves and spike only elk regulations in Eastern Washington and for western Washington the main questions were about hoof rot in SW Washington and elk in general. Overall few or no complaints were received on elk management in Region 6. Private timberland access was an issue for some, but most of these revolved around Hancock and Rayonier's current lease programs. The highest

numbers of access questions were from Military personnel stationed in the Puget Sound area. Many requested help in understanding our regulations and information on where to hunt. We also received a request from “The Veteran Sportsman, Inc” to assist them in getting disabled veterans some hunting opportunities.

### **Wildlife Areas**

Wildlife Area staff continued to assess damage that occurred during the recent winter storm event. Major damage has been focused primarily on the Scatter Creek and Davis Creek Units, however down trees and limbs have also caused damage at several other South Puget Sound locations. Storm damage at the Davis Creek Unit included the destruction of approximately 100' of industrial gutter along the north side of the milling parlor building (pictures attached).



Scatter Creek Unit



Davis Lake Unit

Also at Scatter Creek, staff assessed trail access and noted that the first half mile of the horse trail received extensive damage with downed trees, tops, and limbs covering a good majority of the trail. It is currently impassable for horses and will require a minimum of two full crew days to clear. (Picture below)



Horse Trail – Scatter Creek